

# 25 Years *Murder-Free* in 'Gun Town USA'

***Crime rate plummeted after law required firearms for residents***

As the nation debates whether more guns or fewer can prevent tragedies like the Virginia Tech Massacre, a notable anniversary passed last month in a Georgia town that witnessed a **dramatic plunge in crime and violence after mandating residents to own firearms.**

In March 1982, 25 years ago, the small town of Kennesaw – responding to a handgun ban in Morton Grove, Ill. – unanimously passed an ordinance requiring each head of household to own and maintain a gun. Since then, despite dire predictions of "Wild West" showdowns and increased violence and accidents, not a single resident has been involved in a fatal shooting – as a victim, attacker or defender.



Kennesaw, Ga., City Hall

The crime rate initially plummeted for several years after the passage of the ordinance, with the 2005 per capita crime rate actually significantly lower than it was in 1981, the year before passage of the law.

Prior to enactment of the law, Kennesaw had a population of just 5,242 but a crime rate significantly higher (4,332 per 100,000) than the national average (3,899 per 100,000). The

latest statistics available – for the year 2005 – show the rate at 2,027 per 100,000. Meanwhile, the population has skyrocketed to 28,189.

By comparison, the population of Morton Grove, the first city in Illinois to adopt a gun ban for anyone other than police officers, has actually dropped slightly and stands at 22,202, according to 2005 statistics. More significantly, perhaps, the city's crime rate increased by 15.7 percent immediately after the gun ban, even though the overall crime rate in Cook County rose only 3 percent. Today, by comparison, the township's crime rate stands at 2,268 per 100,000.

This was not what some predicted.

In a column titled "Gun Town USA," Art Buchwald suggested Kennesaw would soon become a place where routine disagreements between neighbors would be settled in shootouts. The Washington Post mocked Kennesaw as "the brave little city ... soon to be pistol-packing capital of the world." Phil Donahue invited the mayor on his show.

Reuters, the European news service, today revisited the Kennesaw controversy following the Virginia Tech Massacre.

Police Lt. Craig Graydon said:

"When the Kennesaw law was passed in 1982 there was a substantial drop in crime ... and we have maintained a really low crime rate since then. We are sure it is one of the lowest (crime) towns in the metro area."

Kennesaw is just north of Atlanta.

The Reuters story went on to report:

"Since the Virginia Tech shootings, some conservative U.S. talk show hosts have rejected attempts to link the massacre to the availability of guns, arguing that had students been allowed to carry weapons on campus someone might have been able to shoot the killer."

Virginia Tech, like many of the nation's schools and college campuses, is a so-called "gun-free zone," which Second Amendment supporters say invites gun violence – especially from disturbed individuals seeking to kill as many victims as possible.

Cho Seung-Hui murdered 32 and wounded another 15 before turning his gun on himself.

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